

For Release: March 14, 2005

Contact: Elaine Lidholm, 804/786-7686

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
NOW REGISTERING PREMISES FOR NATIONAL ANIMAL ID SYSTEM**

In early 2004, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) formed the Virginia Animal Identification Working Group to address the implementation of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). With support from the Working Group, the Virginia livestock industry, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Virginia's land grant universities, and Virginia Cooperative Extension, VDACS is now initiating the livestock premises phase of this program.

Farmers and other livestock facility owners from every facet of the Virginia livestock and poultry industries can now sign up for a unique premises identification for their farms or facilities. The premise ID will identify the locations of all livestock operations in the state, including both commercial and backyard herds and flocks as well as concentration points such as livestock markets, fairs and competitions. Livestock owners may register by calling 804/786-2483 or e-mailing prem.id@vdacs.virginia.gov. They may also register online at <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/animals/index.html>.

The ability to identify animals and trace livestock or poultry movements rapidly is crucial to an effective animal disease response. Currently, it can take days or weeks to track that movement and to ensure that officials have detected all exposed or diseased animals. When NAIS is fully implemented in 2008, the tracking process will be streamlined, greatly enhancing disease eradication. The national premises and animal identification system has been under development for several years, with input and ideas from nearly 70 federal and state animal health agencies and livestock industry associations.

The livestock premises identification program is a voluntary program to assign a unique identifier to each address in the Commonwealth where livestock and poultry are housed, commingled, or exhibited. It is the first step in implementing a National Animal ID System. When fully implemented the NAIS should allow animal health officials to trace animals back to their farms of origin within forty-eight hours of the diagnosis of an animal disease emergency and to verify ages of United States animals and animal products exported to a foreign country.

The National Animal ID System has two major components. The first is the unique premises or facility identification, which identifies the location of livestock operations. This seven-character alphabetic and numerical address will be assigned to

farms and other sites that maintain or move livestock or poultry. Premises information will reside on a database at the USDA. Each state will manage its own information, which will be directly accessible only by animal health officials.

The second component involves the unique identification of each head of livestock moved from its original herd. Cattle, sheep, goats, deer and some other species of livestock will have an individual identification device. For other species, such as swine and poultry, the number can apply to groups of animals if they spend their entire production life together as a group or unit. Regulatory agencies do not need or want access to production data, but information such as the age and class of animal and its movement is critical for finding potentially infected or exposed animals during a disease situation.

VDACS introduced the Standardized Premises Registration System (SPRS) at the Virginia State Dairymen's Convention in January and the Virginia Cattlemen's Association Convention in February. The Department also conducted training sessions for its own veterinary staff and marketing personnel, as well as staff from USDA. Virginia Cooperative Extension will conduct six sessions in March to train an agent for every locality on the NAIS, SPRS use, and using GPS units to obtain geo-coordinates.

The Virginia Animal Identification Working Groups helps VDACS understand producer concerns as it implements this program. Its members include producers or representatives from the beef, pork, sheep, goat, equine, poultry and dairy industries; members of the Livestock Marketing Association; working food animal veterinary practitioners; a representative of the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation; VDACS; USDA; and faculty from agricultural universities, including the Virginia Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, the Dean of Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, a faculty member/veterinarian from Virginia State, and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

"Virginia and the U.S. must have a reliable and efficient method for tracking and finding livestock and poultry during an animal disease investigation or when an animal health emergency occurs," said J. Carlton Courter, III, VDACS Commissioner. "I think all of us involved with the food supply are eager to get the premises and animal ID program up and running so we know we have the ability to trace an animal within 48 hours. It's a huge step toward protecting the integrity of our food supply and the health of our citizens."

###

05-17
3/14/05 ejl
Targeted

Comment: Because NAIS is not a farm to fork system, we're really trying to emphasize this as an animal health initiative. Sometimes stakeholders get confused when we link it to the food supply.